District Review Report

School District No. 22 (Vernon)

February 1-4, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Robin Brayne, Superintendent, School District No. 44 (North Vancouver)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name: Vernon

District Number: 22

Superintendent: Mike McAvoy

Date of Visit: February 1-4, 2004

Team Chair: Robin Brayne, Superintendent of Schools, North Vancouver School District

Team Members: Reggi Balabanov, Parent, Surrey School District
Bonnie Chappell, Director, School Services, Prince George School District
Mike Hooker, Principal, Revelstoke School District
Krista Horn, Teacher, Rocky Mountain School District
Bob Peacock, Superintendent, Nicola-Similkameen School District
Bobbi Plecas, Lead Director, Ministry of Education
Bev Rundell Principal, West Vancouver School District

Context

School District No. 22 (Vernon) is located in the North Okanagan and serves the communities of Vernon, Coldstream, Lavington, Lumby and Cherryville.

The School District provides a comprehensive education program to 9,690 students in five full secondary schools, 16 elementary schools, three storefront locations and one online educational program. Student enrollment is decreasing by approximately 1.5 % annually, a trend expected to continue for at least the next three years.

The School District provides a comprehensive educational program (humanities, mathematics/sciences, physical education, fine arts, applied skills and careers), early and late French Immersion, secondary French Immersion, an array of programs and supports for Aboriginal students, a variety of educational programs and specialized supports for students with exceptional learning needs, a K-grade 7 Montessori program, an Elite Performers program and on-line learning.

The School District employs approximately 570 teachers, 150 qualified teachers on call, 300 support staff and 56 administrators.

A School Board, consisting of seven trustees representing each of the communities served, governs the School District. The School District is, by all accounts received, well managed and has a culture of positive, respectful and collaborative relationships among the various partner groups.

District Review Report

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Summary of Process

The purposes of a School District Review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data
- Review the school district performance plans (accountability contracts) and school plans to improve student achievement
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement
- Make recommendations to the school district and to the minister about improving student achievement
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in plans to improve student achievement

The School District Review Team, in addressing the above purposes reviewed the following:

- Processes whereby the goals, objectives and targets set out in the District plan and school plans were determined
- Progress of the school district and selected schools with respect to improvement targets, noting particular strengths
- School district strategies used to support the District plan and the supports provided to schools
- Coherence between the District plan and selected school plans

The School District Review Team met with school district senior administrators and curriculum and instruction district staff to review elements of the district plan for improving student achievement. In attendance at this meeting were representatives of trustees, parents and employee groups. Team representatives met with executive members of the School District Parent Advisory Council and the Aboriginal Targeted Funding Committee.

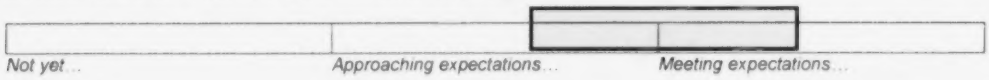
The Team visited 16 elementary and secondary schools identified by the school district and by the ministry of education. The elementary schools visited were: Cherryville, BX, Harwood, Whitevale, Coldstream, Kidston, Alexis Park, West Vernon, Lavington and Beairsto. The secondary schools visited were: Charles Bloom, Open Door, Clarence Fulton, Kalamalka, W.L. Seaton, and Vernon. The purpose of the school meetings was to review, with School Planning Councils, the elements of school plans for improving student achievement.

The Team provided a de-briefing to School District senior administration and curriculum and instruction leadership staff and partner groups at the conclusion of its review.

The Team was very appreciative of the comprehensive data and documentation provided and the welcome it received at each of its visits. The Team was impressed with the willingness of all to provide and respond to any information and questions.

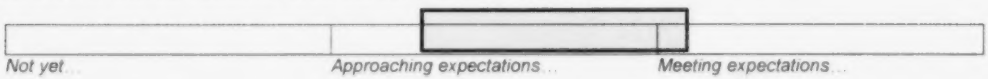
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



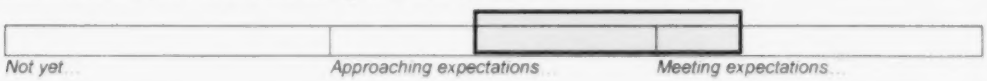
- While there is a noticeable district focus on literacy, numeracy and safety, the specific objectives and improvement targets are not clearly expressed in the plan.
- Some schools are in the early stages of establishing improvement plans based on achievement data.
- Most schools have relevant goals focussed on improving student achievement.
- Some schools need to be clear and specific in their goals. This would be accomplished by establishing focussed objectives.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



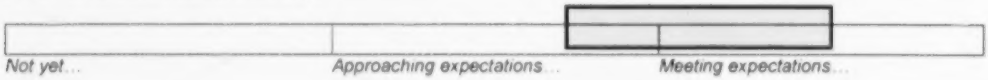
- The district has conducted a broad scan of achievement data but appeared to have difficulty identifying specific areas of focus.
- Schools are at varying stages in the development of their rationale for their improvement goals.
- While some schools have clear rationale for their goals, others have none or are in the beginning stages of development.
- To identify the concerns related to specific sub-groups, there is a need for deeper analysis of school, district and provincial data.

3. *Data:*
   Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



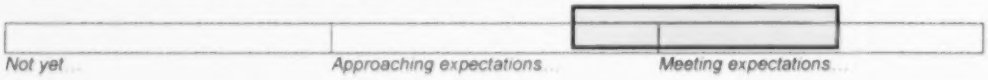
- The district and schools are using a variety of school, district and provincial data sources to establish goals.
- There is some evidence that the district and schools are examining trends over time.
- The district and some schools need to make more use of the available achievement data, disaggregated by sub-groups (i.e. gender, Aboriginal ancestry, french immersion etc).
- In a number of schools there is a need to use data to define areas of emphasis and need.

4. *Strategies:*
   Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



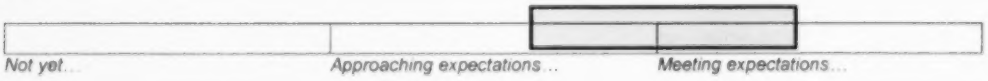
- The district and schools are using a wide variety of strategies to improve student achievement.
- Many strategies have connections to goals. In some instances, these connections need to be formalized and strengthened.
- District literacy strategies and available resources are strongly supporting schools in their literacy goals and strategies.
- In some schools, there is a need to use research to identify and implement best practices.

5. *Structures:*
   Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



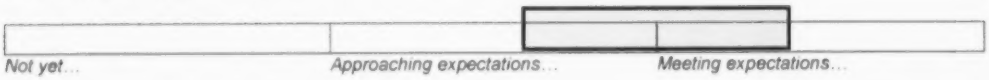
- The district has aligned its structures and resources in support of student achievement goals.
- Many schools have allocated funds, adjusted timetables and dedicating staff meeting time to support student achievement goals.
- In some instances, strategies, initiatives and projects associated with goals for student achievement, though worthy, ambitious and having advocates, do not always align with goals and targets for improving student achievement.

6. *Results:*
   Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



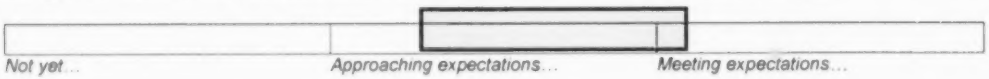
- The district and schools are achieving improved results.
- The district and schools are not clearly demonstrating those results in their current School Growth Plan and Accountability Contract format.
- The district and schools are in the early stages of developing their ability and capacity to monitor results and adjust strategies to inform instruction.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



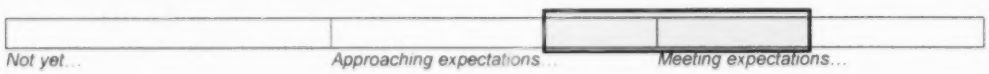
- The importance of curriculum, instruction and student achievement are prominent in the agenda of management and staff meetings.
- There are multiple means employed to communicate with parents respecting improvement goals and strategies. More effort is required to expand the dialogue and to encourage two-way communication.
- School district leaders are highly visible and communicate frequently with partner groups respecting school district plans, accomplishments and available supports. More communication needs to be focussed on student achievement.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued.



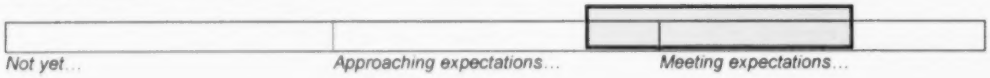
- There is knowledge of district goals and a belief that school goals are reflected in district goals.
- School and district goals, while consistent and aligned, are not as explicitly connected as they could be to create powerful strategies to improve student achievement.
- Schools have goals, strategies and targets that reflect the uniqueness of the school community and school history

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement:*
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- The district has developed effective training for SPCs.
- SPCs are established in each of the schools and are actively involved in the development of student achievement goals.
- Many schools have community connections that give financial and in-kind contributions to support student achievement.
- The establishment of a district principal responsible for Aboriginal education has provided district direction in building relationships with the Aboriginal community.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- The district is encouraging and supportive of efforts by personnel to improve student achievement through their school plans.
- There are many opportunities for schools to take advantage of district supports.
- The district builds leadership capacity of school administrators in implementing strategies to improve student achievement.
- While parents report being involved, continued effort is required to find new and innovative ways to engage all parents in the development and review of student achievement goals.

Strengths

School District No. 22 (Vernon) is a district characterized by an obvious enthusiasm for fostering opportunities for students. It has many strengths, which include:

- Widespread community support for schools.
- Strong and positive district climate, which supports the promotion of a continuing improvement of student achievement.
- High levels of trust and respect among education partners – parents, teachers, trustees, support staff and administrators.
- Pride among students, employees and parents in district accomplishment and student achievement.
- A strong commitment to teacher mentoring and support, and for leadership development;
- The presence of COOL school as a provincial leader in online learning.
- An ongoing commitment to meaningful student involvement in governance, leadership and safety at both elementary and secondary schools.
- A variety of educational programs and supports to accommodate a wide range of student interests, needs and educational requirements.
- A strong culture of learning from experience and professional development in support for establishing caring learning environments.

Promising Practices

The team observed a number of promising practices that may be instructive or useful to other districts in improving student achievement. They include:

- District-wide common secondary school timetable to facilitate student access and choice.
- High performance program for provincial and national level athletes.
- The Literacy Project in grades 3 – 5.
- The Teacher Development Program for beginning teachers and teachers new to the district.
- Ongoing professional development of administrators in literacy instruction and teaching strategies.

Recommendations

To strengthen and intensify the efforts and focus of the district, the team offers the following recommendations:

- Develop a standardized and more simplified format (template) for describing district and school plans for improving student achievement.
- Develop or intensify district-wide and common strategies for supporting and monitoring goals for improving student achievement in areas identified in all school plans.
- Continue working with the local band in developing a strong identity for aboriginal students.
- Develop a common language for expressing goals for student achievement in more explicit and measurable terms. This will increase the clarity of improvement targets and facilitate planning.
- Develop more fully district-wide supports and models of best practices to support school numeracy goals, specifically in the areas of exemplary classroom instruction, appropriate assessment practices and timely intervention programs.

February 6, 2004